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NAME: **COURSE:**

The Pencil Box
By Doris Sanford

I was deep in thought at my office, preparing a lecture to be given that evening at a college across town, when the phone rang. A woman I had never met introduced herself and said that she was the mother of a seven-year-old and that she was dying. She said that her therapist had advised her that discussing her pending death with her son would be too traumatic for him, but somehow that didn't feel right to her.

Knowing that I worked with grieving children, she asked my advice. I told her that our heart is often smarter than our brain and that I thought she knew what would be best for her son. I also invited her to attend the lecture that night since I was speaking about how children cope with death. She said she would be there.

I wondered later if I would recognize her at the lecture, but my question was answered when I saw a frail woman being half-carried into the room by two adults. I talked about the fact that children usually sense the truth long before they are told and that they often wait until they feel adults are ready to talk about it before sharing their concerns and questions. I said that children usually can handle truth better than denial, even though the denial is intended to protect them from pain. I said that respecting children meant including them in the family sadness, not shutting them out.

She had heard enough. At the break, she hobbled to the podium and through her tears she said, "I knew it in my heart. I just knew I should tell him." She said that she would tell him that night.

The next morning I received another phone call from her. She could hardly talk, but I managed to hear the story through her choked voice. She had awakened him when they got home the night before and quietly said, "Derek, I have something to tell you."

He quickly interrupted her, saying, "Oh, Mommy, is it now that you are going to tell me that you are dying?"

She held him close, and they both sobbed while she said, "Yes."

After a few minutes, the little boy wanted down. He said that he had something for her that he had been saving. In the back of one of his drawers was a dirty pencil box. Inside the box was a letter written in simple scrawl. It said, "Good-bye, Mom. I will always love you."

How long he had been waiting to hear the truth, I don't know. I do know that two days later the young mother died. In her casket was placed a dirty pencil box and a letter.

QUESTIONS

1. Answer the following questions using your own words. (2 points)

a. What did the therapist advise the young mother?

b. What did the writer advise her?

2. Are the following statements true or false? (1 point)

a. The young mother attended the writer's lecture. ☐

b. The young mother did not tell her son about her situation. ☐

3. Find a word or phrase in the text which, in context, is similar in meaning to (1 point):

a. Not convenient, that causes pain, unbearable, upsetting.

b. To deal successfully with a difficult situation, handle.

4. Choose a, b or c in each question below. Only one choice is correct (2 points)

1. When the writer was preparing a lecture

    a. A man came to visit her.

    b. A woman came to visit her.

    c. A woman telephoned her.

2. The lecture that the writer was going to give included information on

    a. Children without parents.

    b. Sad children living in pain.

    c. Abandoned children.

3. The writer recognised the person at the lecture because

    a. She introduced herself.

    b. She was very weak and was accompanied by two people.

    c. She was dressed in blue.

4. After the lecture that person

    a. Went to a bar to have some coffee

    b. went home and told her son that she was dying

    c. Gave her son a pencil box.

5. Composition (100-150 words) ***Are you a fit/healthy person? What do you do to be healthy?*** **(4 points)**